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ABSTRACT

Research indicates that sexual abuse of children is widespread and underreported. Since child development workers are among children's first contacts, the emotional and physical well-being of the young children in their care depends to a large degree on workers' awareness of characteristics of sexually abused children and abusive parents. In turn, that awareness largely depends on the training that workers have received. Because of both therapeutic and legal issues, specialized training is necessary for the child development worker to intervene effectively; this training should address techniques related to identification, disclosure, documentation, reporting, testifying, and case resolution. Such training should include college coursework at the undergraduate and graduate levels in standard elementary education, counselor education, special education, early childhood education, child and family development, and young-child mental health programs. Coursework could consist of three modules addressing physical abuse, psychological abuse and neglect, and sexual abuse. Such a course should be a requirement for satisfactory completion of any child development training program. (Appended are "The Declaration of Interdependence for American Children" and the National Education Association's Resolution B-24 concerning child abuse.) (RH)

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SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN: A TRAINING MODEL FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT SPECIALISTS/WORKERS

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For most young children the early years are full of warmth and wonder as they learn how good life can be and how special they are. For many others who are used and abused by adults in their lives the early years can be confusing, painful, indeed the end of life as an innocent--too early, too cruelly, and yes, criminally. When the closeness of older people, rather than representing nurturance and protection for their budding sexuality (an awareness of body and self, the pleasure of play and exploration, the growth of a healthy self-concept as a sexual person) comes in the form of intimate intrusion into a child's space in the form of sexual exploitation, his/her development is both interrupted and corrupted.

Sexual abuse, research shows, is widespread and distressingly under reported. As a result, many young children are caught in a network of destructive family dynamics which causes them both physical and emotional trauma while both they and their families display stress signals that too often go unnoticed.

Since child development workers are among their first contacts, the emotional and physical well being of young children in their care depends to a large degree on the level of awareness these workers have regarding the characteristics of sexually abused children and sexually abusive parents. Further, this awareness depends, for the most part, on the extent to which child development training institutions have accepted their responsibilities for teaching this difficult aspect of working with young children and families.

What I propose is an exposure to issues related to childhood sexual trauma at the training level, including college coursework at the undergraduate and graduate level in standard elementary education, counselor education, special education, early childhood education, child and family development and young child mental health programs. Such a learning opportunity would encourage and prepare participants to take with them to the various workplaces in which child development specialists/workers function (schools, hospitals, day care centers, child development centers) an understanding of their key position in the identification and resolution of childhood sexual trauma. Lack of this basic awareness leads to a sense of frustration and inadequacy, but worse, failure to act to help children.

> It will be only when professionals recognize, corroborate, and report cases of sexual abuse with the same sense of commitment that they bring to other forms of child abuse that the extent and the nature of the problem will be known, and the appropriate methods of treatment become widespread.[1]

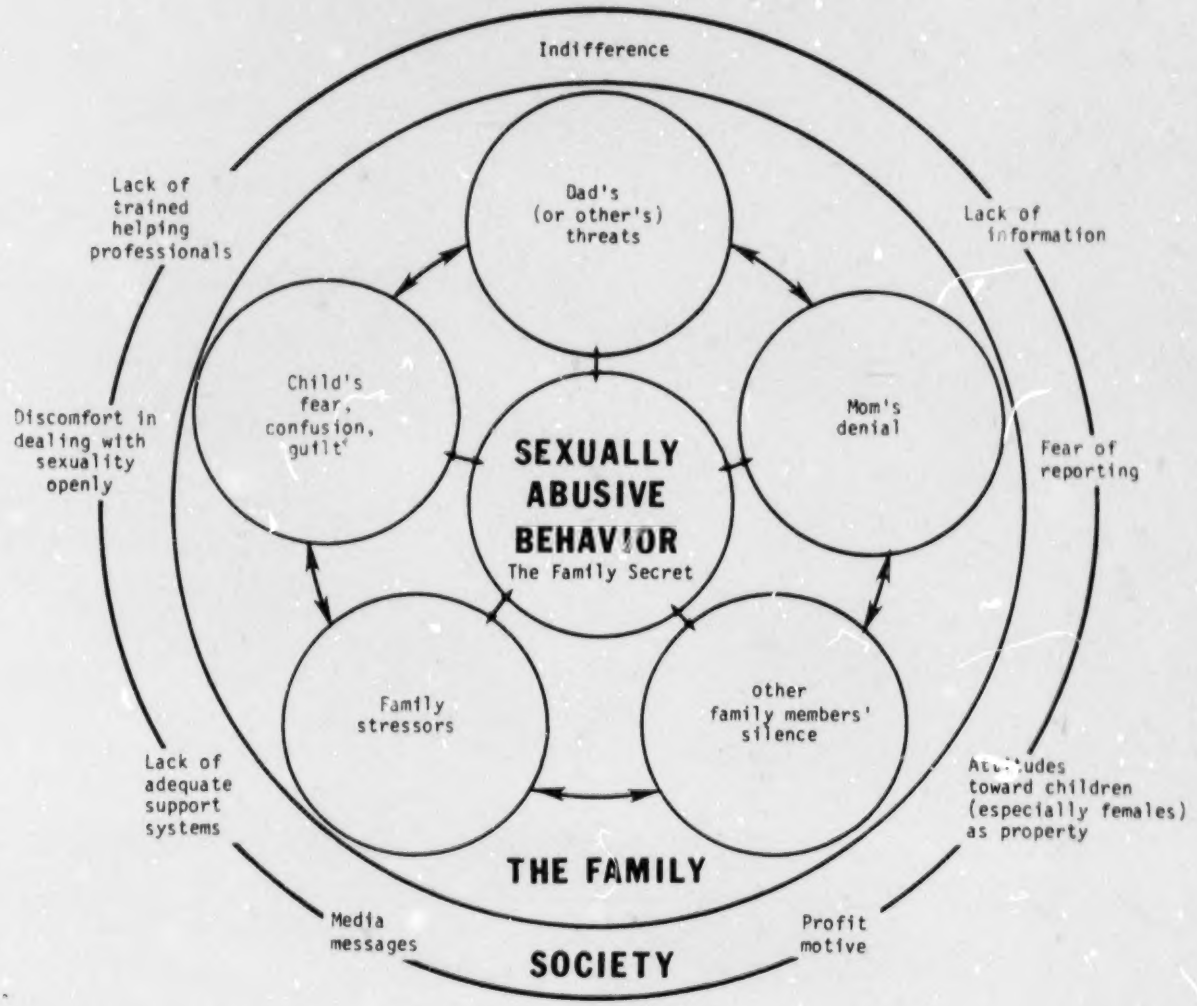
> The problem is that sexual abuse of children is widespread, unrecognized, or when identified, not dealt with appropriately, all of which contribute to a cyclical pattern of insensitivity and ineffectiveness on behalf of young children.[2]

Properly trained child development workers can make a substantial difference as a first line of defense and support for the children and families with whom they work. The literature clearly establishes the responsibility of society, and in particular, members of the helping professions who work with children in school settings[3] to become increasingly aware of the role they can play "in opening the door on this closet of hurt and fear".[4] How can we, after all, continue to teach the "whole child" concept and methods of working with young children and all the other components of a quality training program without giving more attention to this serious problem which threatens the very spirit of childhood and the strength of families now and in the future?

Because of both therapeutic and legal issues, specialized training is necessary for the child development worker to enable him/her to deal with sexually abused children and, in some cases, offenders. Specifically, this training should address techniques related to identification, disclosure, documentation, reporting, testifying and resolution. Improper intervention can be detrimental and dangerous to the child. Failure to do so always is. Unaware child development workers contribute to the system of conditions and relationships characteristic of sexual abuse.[5] They contribute to the role society plays in making it possible for sexual abuse to continue. Please refer to the model on the next page for an understanding of the way this happens.

From the perspective of a twenty year veteran of child development programs in public and private settings, including the supervision of child development students from education, mental health and health fields, the following training suggests a necessary beginning if we are to continue to call ourselves true child advocates. I propose a course consisting of three modules: Physical abuse, psychological abuse and neglect, and sexual abuse. Such a course should be a requirement for satisfactory completion of any child development training program, regardless of the program focus or future work setting. Introductory coursework in basic child development should be prerequisite. The ability to recognize appropriate growth patterns and age expected behaviors is essential to the awareness of troubled development. Instruction should be shared by a

SYSTEM OF CONDITIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS CHARACTERISTIC OF INTERFAMILY SEXUAL ABUSE



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team from the human service field with specific training and experience in the dynamics of sexual abuse, and a member of the training staff or guest instructor/ consultant with expertise in theory and practice methodologies appropriate to young children. Such an integrated approach would ensure a pragmatic focus. Area medical, mental health and human service agencies (child protective units) should be enlisted to provide resource people, materials and field experiences.

Satisfactory completion of the course would be based on active participation in class discussions, video-taped roleplaying, field placement, demonstration of concept acquisition through a case study report and compilation of a notebook. Within the structure of the course students should be introduced to a survey of the literature through handouts and bibliographies related to the implication of childhood sexual abuse in the setting in which they will be working.

A field placement, to depend on the length of the course, should focus on a case for which the student would be responsible for reviewing in writing and making a presentation to the class in the format of a peer review.

Attention should be given in class to considerations of confidentiality and the language and service delivery methods of human service agencies with whom they will be interacting. Encouragement and release time should be given for the attendance of relevant workshops. Course content should look something like this:

1.) overview of the problem, historical perspective, definitions and terminology, the law, statistics --regional, state and national;

2.) identification of the sexually abused child, behavioral characteristics, awareness and feedback techniques, considerations in dealing with the sexually abused child in various child development settings;

3.) role of the child development specialist/worker, levels and parameters of responsibility, legal implications, therapeutic considerations;

4.) course evaluation and follow-up.

All known resources should be brought to bear in developing a professional response to this problem among child development workers. This is especially critical to offset the reluctance many child development people have to getting involved with positions that put them at odds with the families of the children with whom they work, knowing full well that their relationship with parents are

fundamental to their relationship with children. Strategies exist and can be taught/learned for protecting both.

> It is time to insist that the best interst of the child transcends the parent and family interest, that the child has an inalienable right to grow up in a loving, safe, predictable and responsible home....It is time to change the status of children from property to sacred trust, with parents as trustees held accountable to a strict code of conduct....School curriculum from preschool up...should teach responsible ways of expressing emotions and needs, teach youth that they have a right to enjoy love and affection without physical or sexual abuse, and teach them the value and means of human relatedness, caring, and commitment.[6]

For years we in child development have been saying we believe this. We can and must prove it by training our child development people about the sexual abuse of children.

APPENDIX I[7]

THE DECLARATION OF INTERDEPENDENCE FOR AMERICAN CHILDREN, IN PHILADELPHIA, SEPTEMBER 13, 1976, THE UNANIMOUS DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES AND RIGHTS FOR CHILDREN BY CONCERNED AMERICAN CITIZENS

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for responsible and concerned American citizens to confront and challenge the political and societal bonds; to review the stated priorities with regard to the children of America; and to demand on their behalf a separate and equal station in the concerns and priorities of government and societal institutions to which the laws of nature and nature's God entitle them, then a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to declare such independent but equal status.

Prudence dictates that governments long established should not be changed nor their priorities realigned for light and transient causes; accordingly, all experience has shown that mankind is more disposed to suffer while evils are sufferable than to right itself by abolishing the forms to which it is accustomed. But when a long train of abuses, indifferences and neglect by the society's government and institutions subjects a portion of that society, the children of America, to hunger, fear, isolation, abuse, neglect, despair and death, it is the right and duty of the people to demand of their government that the principles and priorities of that government be altered to provide new institutions to insure the future security and happiness of such children. Such is the suffering of these unrepresented and voiceless children, such is the fundamental tyranny over our children, and such is now the necessity which compels us the people to alter our present priorities. Let these facts be submitted to the world.

Through our government and societal institutions we fail to realize and act at the highest levels of government a spiritual and moral commitment to the rights, interests, protection and concerns of children in the design and implementation of government activities. We create numerous offices and agencies ostensibly for the benefit and welfare of children, but refuse to adequately fund their operation, thus preventing the delivery of mandated services.

We fail to coordinate the few allocated government resources with existing resources in the private sector, resulting in costly and unnecessary duplication in administrative systems, and substantially reducing direct resources and services for the children.

We fail to recognize or respond to the epidemic of child abuse and neglect which afflicts millions of American children, thus silently sanctioning such abuse and neglect.

We fail to recognize and guarantee the basic and comprehensive nutritional, educational, financial and health needs of all American children independent from and equal to the rights of their parents.

We fail to hold parents accountable as trustees of a sacred trust to insure the well-being of each child, a sacred trust to be enforced by the community through its laws.

We tolerate legal presumptions and theory which equate parental rights with property rights, thereby inhibiting or precluding timely and effective interventions on behalf of endangered children, with the tragic result that thousands die each year of abuse and neglect and that 17 million children are so handicapped through abuse, neglect or poverty as to be unable when adults to participate in the American mainstream.

We fail to respond to the steady deterioration of human values and family life upon which our nation was established and with which young Americans can develop happy and secure futures.

We deny our children and their families the right to receive comprehensive health care, including psychiatric treatment or counseling, and instead we intrude on their privacy in the name of reform and treatment through courts of law.

We fail to listen to and consider the viewpoints of children in matters which affect them.

We fail to recognize them as persons before the law, in the family, schools and society, and we fail to recognize children as our nation's greatest natural resource and America's first priority. Concerned American citizens have petitioned for redress of these grievances. These petitions have been answered only by repeated surveys, pilot projects, and committee referrals. We tire of empty political offerings.

We have challenged in the courts the failure of the community and of the government to respond to children's needs. We have reminded them that our children, as unrepresented and voiceless citizens, need special and pre-eminent consideration in all matters of government and community affairs. With few notable exceptions these petitions and challenges have been repeatedly ignored. Our governments and institutions have been deaf to the voices for social justice.

WE, THEREFORE, as concerned citizens assembled in earnest hope, do, in the names of the millions of American children who otherwise have few or no advocates solemnly publish and declare,

THAT the children of the United States of America are, and of right ought to be, free and interdependent persons;

THAT they are the beneficiaries of the sacred trust of their parents or custodians;

AND THAT, as free and interdependent persons, they have the full right to grow to maturity in a family environment which facilitates their development into mature and responsible adults; to be supported, maintained and educated to their maximum potential; to be regarded as persons within all social and legal institutions; to receive fair treatment from any authority and to receive comprehensive health care; to be emancipated from the limitations of the parent-child relationship when that relationship has sufficiently deteriorated to endanger the child; and to receive special care, consideration and protection in the administration of law or justice so that the child's best interests are always paramount.

AND, FOR THE SUPPORT OF THIS DECLARATION, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other and to American children our unending and determined personal commitment.

TO THE LEADERS OF OUR GOVERNMENTS AND INSTITUTIONS WE DECLARE our resolve that these principles and rights of American children must become a priority for recognition and adoption by all in authority without delay.

APPENDIX II

NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION RESOLUTION B-24. Child Abuse[8]

The National Education Association believes that all children should be protected from child abuse, including incest, and that educators are in a position to observe and recognize abuse which has been inflicted on children.

The Association and its affiliates should--

a. Cooperate with community organizations to increase public awareness and understanding of child abuse
b. Encourage the development and use of materials to increase student awareness of child abuse
c. Encourage development of teacher preparation courses and professional development programs that stress the identification of, reporting procedures for, and techniques in dealing with abused children
d. Encourage the development by affiliates of educator awareness programs dealing with the abused child.

The Association urges its affiliates to seek the enactment of state and local legislation that would--

a. Provide educators reporting suspected child abuse immunity from legal action
b. Require educators to report to the appropriate authorities instances of suspected child abuse
c. Provide for protection of children from other children.

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